

State Health Insurance Assistance Program

Responsibilities

The State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) provides information, education and assistance to Arizona's 690,000 Medicare beneficiaries, their families, caregivers and service professionals with regard to potential eligibility for benefits, insurance or assistance programs. The responsibilities of the Arizona SHIP include:

- Provision of health insurance information, counseling and assistance to vulnerable and older adults, their families, caregivers and service providers to ensure they receive the government and private benefits to which they are entitled;
- Provision of information and education on long term care insurance, benefit or assistance programs including Medicaid and Medicare managed care options to enable beneficiaries to make informed choices;
- Conducting outreach to under-served populations to ensure they understand the health benefits available, how to access them and their rights and responsibilities;
- Training of SHIP and Information and Referral staff and volunteers in Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and affiliated organizations in Medicare, Medicaid and other benefit programs in order to allow them to counsel clients. Volunteers are trained to assist clients in obtaining services or benefits and preparing appeals of denials when necessary; and
- Education and outreach to beneficiaries on Medicare/Medicaid Fraud and Abuse.

Funding and Service Delivery

The Arizona SHIP² is funded by grants from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services³, National Association of State Units on Aging (NASUA) and the Administration on Aging (AoA). Arizona SHIP operates a nationwide, toll free Hotline, which is staffed eight hours per day by experienced volunteer counselors at the A&AA, and in programs conducted by staff and volunteers at the eight AAAs. Over 600 volunteers and staff members of the AAAs or related social and health service organizations have completed a four day training program to provide program services. Many of the volunteers are cross-trained in other

² Arizona SHIP may also be referred to as the Benefits and Insurance Outreach and Pension Counseling Program, as outlined in Title VII of the Older American's Act.

³ Formerly known as Health Care Finance Administration (HCFA).

programs such as Legal Advocacy or Long-Term Care Ombudsman. The program is under the direction of a State SHIP Program Coordinator and SHIP Managers at contracted AAAs.

In SFY 2001, there were 690,000 Medicare beneficiaries who were permanent residents of Arizona. An additional 400,000 Medicare beneficiaries were winter residents. The Arizona SHIP had a total of 102 volunteer counselors who spent 1,573 hours in training and 12,201 hours providing counseling throughout the state. The volunteer counselors provided one-to-one counseling to 4,851 beneficiaries and eight Hotline volunteers provided information and assistance by telephone to 24,254 beneficiaries. Utilizing these volunteer counselors to provide services saved the program over \$152,512 in salaries alone. In addition, the estimated total dollars saved by beneficiaries through counseling assistance was \$2,881,347.

Medicare + Choice

The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 created Medicare +Choice, which added eight different options for Medicare beneficiaries to receive benefits. Arizona was chosen as a pilot state for the introduction of these Medicare +Choice programs. Since 1998 beneficiaries in the rural and urban counties of the state have been impacted by Medicare +Choice Managed Care Plan service area reductions affecting over 36,000 beneficiaries each year. In the fall of 2000, 35,000 beneficiaries were sent plan termination letters referring them to the SHIP Hotline number for assistance. SHIP also assisted the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services with eight emergency outreach events, attended by over 4,000 beneficiaries. During July 2000 through June 2001, over 62,900 beneficiaries were counseled on their Medicare benefits, rights, and protections. With the loss of Medicare +Choice Managed Care Plans, beneficiaries expressed their difficulties in receiving assistance with prescription expenses, finding insurance companies who serve the under 65 disabled market, and affording supplemental insurance. In addition, SHIP assisted with three congressional briefings given by Medicare Contractors during the year.

Outreach

Program staff made 408 educational presentations on Medicare and other benefits, beneficiary rights and responsibilities, and application processes to 35,021 people, and participated in 96 outreach events. The Arizona Beneficiary Coalition continues to partner in outreach and problem resolution with members representing Medicare Parts A and B, Health Services Advisory Group, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, Social Security, A&AA and the Arizona Department of Insurance, through health fairs, outreach events, and newsletters.